

Shenandoah

THE WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

Vol. XII, No. 3

Spring, 1961

75 cents



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Published three times a year at Washington and Lee University by *Shenandoah*,
Box 722, Lexington, Virginia. Rates 75c the copy, \$2.00 the year, \$3.50 for
two years, \$5.25 for three years. Copyright 1961 by *Shenandoah*. Printed at the
Journalism Laboratory Press of Washington and Lee University,
Lexington, Virginia, U. S. A.

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Germaine Brée

THE GENESIS OF *THE STRANGER*

When discussing the works of Albert Camus, it has become customary to see them in the light, not of fiction, but of a so-called "philosophy" of the absurd; this in spite of the fact that the preface to the *Myth of Sisyphus* expressly states that a real philosophy of the absurd is exactly what our time lacks. To the question: "What do you consider the proper relationship of such works as *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* to your fiction?" Camus answered, "I write on different planes, precisely to avoid mixing genres. Thus I have written plays in the language of action, essays in the rational form, novels about the heart's obscurity." (*Venture*, Spring-Summer, 1960). And of these novels, if there is any one whose value is established, it seems to be *The Stranger*, whose genesis can be traced in Camus's still unpublished manuscripts and notebooks, providing valuable insight into the way he worked, at least during that period.

Camus's very first pieces demonstrate his preoccupation with "the heart's obscurity," not "everyman's" heart, but his own. In 1932, when he was eighteen, he sketched out a few brief dialogues to "light up the darkness" of his "uncertainties," calling them *Intuitions*. A few months later he tried out his hand at a short impressionistic description of two houses, an Arab house and a "grey house" of poverty, through which he attempted to communicate "the secret color of a life." The first house hid "under ironic colors the immensity of a stretching out toward the ideal

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and infinite"; the second masked "the essential drama of mediocrity." As his notebooks show, for some years the obsession with mediocrity haunted this young man, born in poverty and apparently fated at best to the monotonous routines of the petty white-collar employee.

Still quite formless and never meant for publication, these first pages show how difficult Camus found it to write in the first person. The "I" inevitably becomes "he" and is doubled by another figure—in much the same way as the houses are double—an onlooker who probes and doubts and questions. Like many adolescents the writer of the dialogues is disturbed by a consciousness of himself as "persona," as actor on the social stage, as a striker and exploiter of poses. The objectification of these "personae" pointed the way to the creation of fictional characters through which experience could be transformed into novel and drama. A little later Camus was to remark in his notebooks upon "the miracle of not having to speak of oneself" brought about by a certain intellectual discipline. In 1949, many years afterwards, he noted that from his first book, *Nuptials* (1938), to *The Rebel* (1951), he had attempted to objectify his experience completely but that henceforward he could "speak in his own name."

Between the *Intuitions* of 1932 and May, 1935, when Camus began to keep his "notebooks," he either made no further attempt at writing, or, dissatisfied with what he wrote, destroyed it. But for the next five years, until May, 1940, when he completed *The Stranger*, we can follow the curious odyssey of the work which was to bring him so much fame. Camus had embarked on the writing of quite another book, *La Vie heureuse*—autobiographical, although presented through a third-person hero, Patrice Mersault—which gave him endless trouble. He wrote a first, then a second version—160 typed pages—before he abandoned it, if indeed he ever did abandon it. There is every reason to think that *The First Man*, the novel Camus was writing when he died, went back to that initial attempt. But in those early years, as he worked on *La Vie heureuse*, one by one, separately, lost in a maze of others, the themes of *The Stranger* appeared.

Far from being written in order to "illustrate" an apriori, established philosophical thesis, *The Stranger* seems to be the

result of a long and circuitous search, through trial and error, for some appropriate point of view. Interrupted by the war, accompanied by a host of other activities and projects, some brought to fruition at the same time, *The Stranger* took shape slowly during a span of five crucial years. The book which emerged was strikingly different from the one Camus had planned.

In its over-all pattern the original novel had been centered on a mother-son relationship, set against the background of poverty which had been Camus's for many years. It raised a double problem: the problem of a child "neglected" or at least whose mother "had neglected in him what needed warmth and protection although she had not abandoned him"; and the problem of the revolt yet fascination of a child confronted by so "strange" a mother.

How personal and how central this problem was for Camus becomes obvious when one sees it outlined again and again in various forms in his notebooks. In 1946, Camus outlined two additional novels. The first, called *Justice*, starts with the *enfance pauvre* (the poverty-stricken childhood), and present a central character who moves through various phases of revolt and commitment, returning in the end to the mother. The second outline, untitled, sketches a child's unhappy struggle against the shameful feelings caused by his poverty. Camus wrote in his notebooks for 1937 of the "misery and grandeur of this world," a world where "the absurd reigns and love saves from the absurd." At the source of all his works lie the solitude and humiliation of his childhood and the unspoken claim to a compensating love that it never afforded him.

It is interesting to see this theme returning once again among the earliest (1951-1953) notes for *The First Man*:

A poverty-stricken childhood. A life without love (not without enjoyment) the mother was not a source of love. Hence, what takes longest in the world: learning how to love. 'To be born to others': the whole subject of this book.

The Stranger, too, was born in the human forlornness of Camus's own childhood. It did not emerge from the pages of a philosophical treatise.

The mother-son theme with its recognizable cycle of revolt,

departure, experience and return was the matrix of a perpetually shifting whole within which certain themes appeared, were modified and sometimes even disappeared. At one crucial moment in January, 1936, Camus distinguished six main strands in his projected writing:

The Story of a brilliant gamble: luxury
 The Story of the poor sections: death of the mother
 The Story of the house before the world
 The Story of sexual jealousy
 The Story of the man condemned to death
 The Story of the descent toward the sun

Of these, the "brilliant gamble," the "house before the world," and the "jealousy" all played a part in *La Vie heureuse* and clearly play no part in *The Stranger*.

The first of the themes connected with *The Stranger* to impose itself on the imagination of Patrice Mersault, the young hero of the original novel, is the story of "the man condemned to death."

I see the man. He is inside me. And each word he says pulls at my heart. And that other man who wants to make him yield. He lives inside me. I send him a priest to weaken him every day.

The third part of the novel deliberately connects two themes: Patrice Mersault's discovery that he will be a writer and the story of the "man condemned to death." "Catherine," says Patrice, "I know now that I shall write," run Camus's notes for the first chapter of part III, then continuing with: "Story of the man condemned to death. I have returned to my real function which is to write."

A year later, in June, 1937, "the man condemned to death" is still there, but he has emigrated. He has been projected outside both Patrice and the novel, and the "other" who accompanied him is now the same man as the priest. The scene which later becomes "the Stranger's" climactic confrontation with the priest is sketched, but as yet with no framework to support it:

The man condemned to death that a priest comes to see every day. Because of the neck to be cut, the knees which bend, the lips attempting to say no, the wild impulsion towards the earth to hide with a 'God, God'!

And each time the resistance inside the man who does not want to take that way out and who wants to chew all his terror. He dies without words, his eyes full of tears.

Another of the six themes, the "death of the mother," develops in its own strangely independent way. In May, 1938, Camus jots down in his notebooks the story of the funeral of an old woman, at the old people's home of Marengo, a simple item of observation. He describes the Parisian "conciierge" of the home, notes that the grave-digger was the friend of the dead woman, remarks upon the little old man who insists on following the convoy to the church and the cemetery (a two-kilometer walk), and who takes the "short cuts"; sketches the Arab nurse with the bandaged nose. The scene has nothing to do with the novel until Camus comes back to it a few weeks later. Toward the end of the year, *The Stranger* suddenly appears with the opening words: "Today mother died. . . ." This beginning and the use of a first person narrative establish the novel's special tone. "The man condemned to death" has become Meursault.

Originally then, the novel appears to have had two centers of tension: the death of the mother, and the conversation with the priest. In *The Stranger*, when Meursault claims that he has been condemned to death because he failed to cry at his mother's funeral, and judge, advocates, and jury go back unflinchingly to that incident, it is not without cause, but with a cause that goes deeper than the mere matter of social convention. The two themes are closely linked, whether logically or not.

Unlike the incident of "the man condemned to death," the death and funeral of the mother had, at one point, found a place in one of the novel's earlier versions, and then been replaced by a vague project concerning the "death of the grandmother." Eventually it too disappeared from *La Vie heureuse*, which by then was entitled *La Mort heureuse*.

But whatever the fluctuations of the themes, how curiously their slow evolution contrasts with the apparently straightforward simplicity and immediate authority of "the stranger's" voice. And yet for a long time "the man condemned to death" had nothing in common with the man whose mother died, who wanted to become a writer; and the old woman who died in the old people's home had no connection with either of them. Only when the

ideas of "the man condemned to death" and the woman who dies at the home met in the author's mind, only when the third-person hero Mersault became Meursault, and at one and the same time a narrator whose mother is to be buried and a man who will eventually be condemned to death, did "the stranger" become a living character and the novel start to move. Only at this point was the fictional world set in motion, ready to integrate all kinds of apparently extraneous elements.

Many of the more colorful scenes in the novel were sketched separately "from life" in the notebooks, as scattered scenes either experienced or observed. The lunch-time race after the truck and the ride on the back of the truck appear both in the notebooks as a personal episode and in the abandoned novel, as well as in *The Stranger*. The story of Raymond is the synthesis and development of two separate incidents Camus had seen and noted quite independently. The Sunday afternoon scene Meursault observes from the balcony had already been described by Patrice Mersault in *La Vie heureuse*, where Céleste was already running his restaurant. And Perez, who was to absorb the characters of both the grave-digger and the little old man Camus saw at the Marengo funeral, was cast in the earlier novel in the happier role of a fisherman, quite unrelated to any funeral. This, in itself, should deter us from too easily assuming that characters in *The Stranger* have allegorical roles designated by their names, as has sometimes been suggested.

But the most interesting problem concerns the crucial incident of the murder. In the imagination of Patrice Mersault "the man condemned to death" had no past. He appears, with his interlocutor, a man who argues with him, who eventually turns into a priest. As we have seen, it is only when, by endowing him with a mother he must bury, Camus gives Meursault a past and situates him in the everyday world that this newly-fused character starts to speak and to act for himself. As yet, however, he is in no way "guilty" in the eyes of the world, having still committed no crime.

In the final version of *La Mort heureuse* there is also "a man condemned to death," not however by a court of law but by the central character, Patrice himself, who calmly and deliberately shoots him. Here we are at the heart of a complex and ambiguous

relationship. The original Patrice Mersault, a writer, although not Camus, is certainly very close to him, whereas in *The Stranger*, Meursault is both the man who kills and who will be killed, and also the narrator. Unlike his predecessor, "the stranger" does not kill deliberately. The outer mechanism for his accidental act is furnished by Raymond, who so conveniently walked into the novel from the outside world. It is he who provides the concrete setting for Meursault's pre-ordained situation.

If, cutting through the complexities of the creative process, we now look more closely at the patterns as they emerged, we can detect an inner logic at work, although often quite blindly. It is apparent in the conclusion of the two novels and the theme described as "the story of the descent toward the sun," which itself determined the shift to a "happy death" rather than a "happy life," in the title of the abandoned novel. The "descent" is Patrice's descent into death, but in a final acceptance of all things and in an affirmation of life. Patrice, like Meursault, is the man-condemned-to-death, and the reconciliation with the earth is also a reconciliation with the mother. The same reconciliation takes place before Meursault's "ascent" to his own death, imminent but never achieved in *The Stranger*. In his moment of revelation Meursault, at last fully assuming his human condition, is "born to others":

For the first time in a long while I thought of mother. It seemed to me that I understood why at the end of her life she had taken a 'fiancé,' why she had played at beginning all over again. Over there, over there too, around that home where lives were flickering out, evenings must have seemed a melancholy reprieve. So close to death, mother must have felt freed and ready to live everything over again. No one, no one had the right to weep over her. And I too, I felt ready to live everything over again.

Whatever interpretations *The Stranger* may suggest, and they are many, one cannot forget that the voice of the "man-condemned-to-death" spoke first, though not alone, in the heart of a tubercular young man who had almost died in complete solitude, faced with the "surprising indifference" of a silent mother, an indifference which echoed in his own empty heart. Is Meursault's indifference not, in part, a reflection of that initial indifference? Surely it was from thus uniting the two most baffling mysteries

the young Camus had yet encountered that this singular hero derived his power over his creator's imagination. The slow emergence of Camus's novel, before its final compelling brilliancy was achieved, is proof indeed that it dealt with "the obscurity of the heart."



Jack Anderson

Bedraggled Garden

Now rain has scoured summer from the sky,
Pale autumn sun trickles down the walks
Of the bedraggled garden; puddles
Of dahlias lie heavy on the leaves,
The last roses have opened too wide
To hold their life, have outgrown their grace.
The peacocks unfold their shaggy tails,
Their bloom of feathers faded; ragged
Straggles of weeds are all they carry
On their backs. The herons let a cheap
Cry of tin escape from the lockbox
Of their throats and rattle on the air.
The garden has grown bankrupt.

Chambray

Sleeves rolled to show his tattoo—blue bird
Caught in the brambles of his hairy
Arm—the gardener, boots sunk in mud,
Cleans the basin where the lilies died.

JACK ANDERSON is currently assistant drama editor for the *Oakland Tribune*. He has recently been published in *San Francisco Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Colorado Quarterly*.

John W. Aldridge

HEMINGWAY AND EUROPE

What Henry James might have described as "that iniquitous grand debate over places best to *be*"—the whole problem of the American writer's relation to Europe—is one of the familiar and obsessive problems of our literary history. It may even be fair to say that no problem connected with literature has more rigorously engaged the American imagination in the last hundred years, for it calls into question the very premises on which the American writer, always uncertainly, always with a high awareness of his native vulnerability, has based his sense of personal and creative being.

The problem is at the center of James' famous opinion that "it is a complex fate being an American"—in fact it *is* the center when we recall that James added the phrase, "and one of the responsibilities (being an American) entails is to avoid a superstitious valuation of Europe." The addition is typical of the critical honesty with which James approached the problem. For even though he knew, as very few of our writers have had to know, the high price of that fate and had paid it almost every day of his creative life, even though on the practical level he had solved the problem for himself by deciding to settle in Europe, he was still able to sound the note of warning about the very real danger for imaginative Americans in placing a superstitiously high value upon Europe.

But on the level beneath the practical level, the level on which his mind liked most to work and worked at its best, James had of course not solved the problem at all. Throughout their lives in their voluminous correspondence with one another, James and

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his brother William debated the question back and forth across the Atlantic—always honestly, always courteously, always with an amused understanding of how very much they were emotionally in agreement. William never really liked Europe. Yet he fully understood its fascination, even as he understood the shortcomings of America and the necessity that he remain in America in spite of them. Henry liked only England really well of the countries of Europe, and could live nowhere else. Least of all could he live in America, where, as *The American Scene* testifies, the social soil was much too thin for his sort of artistic sensibility, and where he felt disastrously out of touch with his beloved world of observable manners. Henry needed Europe for all the reasons that made him the kind of writer he was and the kind of roving, inquiring creative intelligence he could not help but be. William needed Cambridge, Massachusetts, for all the reasons that made him a family man, an emotional conservative, a university professor, and a pragmatist philosopher. Yet just as William understood the fascination of Europe and had been strongly moved by some of his early experiences of European travel, so Henry never lost his love for America, his sense of being at best, like so many of his fictional characters, the very type of the American abroad. Even though he decided just before his death to become a British subject, in recognition of his deep creative ties to the country of his most productive years, he still left instructions that his ashes be returned after his death to Massachusetts, the place of his deepest and most abiding emotional ties, where in his youth he had been a native of the only world he ever really felt he belonged to—a native, that is, of the James family.

The problem of the American writer's relation to Europe presented itself with particular urgency to the members of James' generation. In confirmation of this, we need think not only of Henry and William but of, among others, their good friend Henry Adams and his concern with the problem. That generation had the advantage of a unique perspective—an historical moment when the division of cultural allegiances between America and Europe had still not been resolved, and it still seemed possible to move in a direct line from the present into the fathering past simply by crossing the Atlantic. The Jameses happened to be

uniquely equipped in both intelligence and experience to make the most of the subject, to show it forth in its full significance, to see it finally as part of the equivocal condition, the extremely complex fate, of being an American. But in differing ways and, for the most part, with less richness of result, the problem presented itself to such diverse minds as Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, Melville, Fuller, Howells, Stephen Crane, and Edith Wharton—or at least, in the case of Melville and Crane, the general problem of foreign travel as a whole did. Emerson had strongly negative opinions about the benefits of travel for the American writer, and Hawthorne, uncomfortable and alone in England, wrote of home with powerful nostalgia in his journals.

The problem reasserts itself with equal force in the generation which we now take to have initiated the modern American literary movement—the generation of Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Thomas Wolfe, Katherine Anne Porter, Archibald MacLeish, and Henry Miller. Again in these writers one sees the problem being phrased with much more vehemence but in the same sets of dialectical opposites that existed for James—American puritanism vs. European sophistication, American innocence vs. European wisdom, American commercialism vs. European humanism, American social vacuity vs. European social complexity. But in the case of these younger writers, there were additional elements that tipped the scale in favor of Europe—such elements as the stimulus of the European artistic renaissance of the first decades of the century; the opportunity to sit at the feet of modernist European as well as exiled British and American masters; and of course the counter-movement in America toward increasing anti-intellectualism and moral puritanism. None of these factors had been half so compelling for James. Essentially, James was a Europeanized or Anglicized American, but his art derived its unique tensions less from European influences than from the experience of Americanism abroad. But the art of the younger generation came under much more direct European influence. In Hemingway one sees Flaubert, Turgenev, and Conrad as well as Mark Twain. Fitzgerald was influenced as much by Conrad as he was by James, Wharton, and Cather. There are

strong echoes of Joyce in much of Thomas Wolfe. The French Symbolist poets show clearly in the early work of Eliot, and through Eliot, in the early work of MacLeish. Gertrude Stein learned a great deal from the French Impressionist painters, and she passed on some of their influence in the instruction she gave Hemingway. These writers confirm the truth of Eliot's remark that it is Americans who have the best chance of becoming real Europeans, of merging their native identities with that of the whole continent of Europe.

But to speak of one of the writers of that now older generation, to speak of Hemingway in his relation to Europe, is to speak in paradoxes; for like all good writers Hemingway defies precise classification, and like all good American writers, he is a curious mixture of American and European qualities. He has, for example, written almost nothing about America directly, although he has written almost always about Americans. Certain of the stories in his first collection *In Our Time* have American settings, mostly in the woods of Michigan where he often vacationed as a boy, and *To Have and Have Not* concerns Key West, Florida, which is about as far out of America as one can get and still be in it. But *The Sun Also Rises* is set in France and Spain, *A Farewell to Arms* in Italy and Switzerland, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in Spain, *Across the River and into the Trees* in Italy, and *The Old Man and the Sea* in Cuba. Hemingway himself has found it as impossible to live in America as James did, having worked for several years as both a journalist and writer in Paris, settled for a time in Key West, and until the recent change of regime, in Cuba.

As near as one can tell from the published accounts of Hemingway's apprentice years, he seems from a very early age to have shared the standard attitudes toward American life that were fashionable with his generation. He apparently found it dull, hypocritical, emotionally oppressive, and intellectually dishonest (where intellectual at all) and all these negative attributes were impressed upon him with more than ordinary force because of the fact that he grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, about which a contemporary of his once said that "Oak Park has prided itself on being the largest village in the world." One can imagine it as

being, in the period when Hemingway lived there, the very prototype of those smug Middle Western towns which H. L. Mencken so enjoyed satirizing in *The American Mercury*. It is understandable that Hemingway should be remembered there with disapproval and that many of the natives are convinced, probably without having read them, that his books are offensive and dirty-minded. But it is equally understandable, knowing American writers, that if Oak Park has forsaken Hemingway, he has not at all forsaken Oak Park, at least not in the assumptions which he has brought to his work. His manner of evaluating his experiences, and the moral context in which he fictionalizes them, have remained throughout his creative life distinctly American, and even more distinctly Middle Western. Like Scott Fitzgerald, a fellow Middle Westerner, he has always been a firm believer in the simple virtues of honesty, fidelity, courage, and manliness—as firm a believer, in fact, as any of the ex-Boy Scouts who find moral satisfaction in disapproving of the immorality of his work.

Hemingway had an almost patly typical American literary education. He began it in high school under the tutelage of sympathetic English teachers and continued it after graduation as a reporter on the staff of the *Kansas City Star*, at the time one of the genuinely distinguished American newspapers, and one that had a strong editorial bias in favor of literary values. While serving with the *Star*, Hemingway learned how to write good journalism, how to write, that is, concisely, simply, without tricks and without cheating. I believe it is fair to say that it was on the *Star* before he was out of his teens that Hemingway developed the basis of his famous "style"—from which, although he has from time to time put it to different uses, he has never fundamentally departed. This is to say that Hemingway had to a very large extent formed himself as the writer he is *before* he began to write imaginatively, and while he was still learning to be a journalist. The standards of journalism were his formative standards, and most of the qualities of his prose are, at bottom, journalistic qualities—a fact which accounts for both his strengths and his weaknesses. He learned as a reporter to write persuasively and entertainingly for a large audience of readers; he developed a style which would enable him to write in this way; but he also in a sense dras-

tically narrowed his imaginative range, and ultimately his dimension as an artist. For the style forced him to deal only with such subjects and such levels of experience as it could effectively express, and it really could express only a very little.

The second crucial phase of Hemingway's literary education was his war experience, and here too the pattern is peculiarly, even comically American. As Charles Fenton has told us, Hemingway served with the Red Cross Ambulance Service in Italy during the period before America entered the war. Again like so many of his contemporaries, he had all the fashionable and naive attitudes toward battle, particularly the glories of dying in battle, and he did everything he could to obtain service in the front lines. His efforts were successful in the sense that he was given the assignment of handing out cigars, chocolate, and other Red Cross supplies to forward units of the Italian Army. One day while thus heroically engaged, Hemingway was wounded by an exploding shell, and although scarcely able himself to walk, managed somehow to carry another wounded soldier to safety. This incident brought his active military career to an abrupt end, but it apparently made a deep and lasting impression on his mind, and it served to crystallize in him certain emotional responses that were to become the chief features of his later fiction.

It gave him, for one thing, an abiding fascination both with the violence of war and with the psychology of men at war, and for another, it furnished him with the rudiments of his moral code—his worship of courage and of direct vs. indirect participation in experience; his almost psychotic sense of the importance of self-control, of "grace under pressure" (as Wyndham Lewis called it) and of absolute fidelity among men engaged in any of the testing pursuits of life. These attitudes were intensified in him, I think, by the fact that his own position at the time of the wounding had been rather questionable. He was not, after all, himself a fighting soldier; he was not really one of the initiated; and even though he had been brave, he was never certain whether he had been *consciously* brave or had carried the soldier to safety while he was mentally paralyzed by shock. He also knew he had felt fear, and with the coming of the fear and the pain of the wounding, he had lost his romantic illusions about the glories of war. So, uneas-

ily, insecurely, not sure if he qualified under his own rules, Hemingway found relief and qualification in writing about, and thereby becoming the master of, a world of rules, and men at war and courage and fidelity and self-control. It would perhaps be unkind and inaccurate to suggest that Hemingway is discharging a cowardice in his books. But if there is a trace of hypocrisy in his makeup, I think it may be here in his treatment of wars and the courageous men who fight them.

Or one might see Hemingway's war experience as having enriched his creative impulse with just enough trauma, pain, and self-knowledge to make it fertile, but not with so much that he was deprived of the power to use it effectively. It is possible that if Hemingway had really been a fighting soldier and had been forced to suffer the privation, boredom, and general wretchedness of prolonged combat duty, he would not have been able to preserve the fresh, essentially uninitiated attitude with which he has treated war. He would quickly have grown beyond his boyish fascination with courageous conduct; he would have been less obsessed with the distinction between those who have suffered and served and those who have not (if only because he would have known to *which* group he himself belonged); he might even have ended by producing an image of men at war so hideously and starkly true that it would have alienated his readers altogether. But the creative virtue of his brief war experience and his almost comic-opera wounding was that they hurt him just enough to give his work emotional authenticity without destroying his illusions altogether. The fine balance of his insider-outsider view was preserved intact, and he could bring both halves to bear on his subject in a way that engendered an effect of melodrama tempered and ratified by the real thing.

Hemingway has been fortunate in this respect throughout his career. His journalistic training made him almost but not quite a first-rate hack writer; his Middle Western background made him almost but not quite a prize candidate for Eagle Scout-hood; his war experience made him almost but not quite a sort of first-generation Norman Mailer; his literary talent made him almost but not quite a genuinely great writer. But he was happily preserved from all these fates, and it is perhaps because he was

preserved from the last that he has achieved the wide acceptance which makes possible such discussions of his work as this.

The third crucial phase of Hemingway's literary education was of course his post-war experience of Europe, where he came under the influence of Gertrude Stein, and where, more importantly, he found the materials to complete the dramatic situation of which the war had given him the first elements. As to the extent of Gertrude Stein's influence, very little is actually known and a very great deal has been alleged. But we do know that Miss Stein did much to counteract Hemingway's journalistic training by insisting that he create rather than report—a piece of advice which he has not always followed—at the same time that she confirmed the wisdom of some of that training by insisting that he write simply and truly, giving the reader the sense of being actually on the scene of the events being described.

But the influence of Europe itself is far more central and verifiable. In certain respects Hemingway found in Europe what James found: relief from the spiritual poverty and social thinness of American life, and the perspective necessary to write both about America from the distance of Europe and about Europe from the distance of the American. But although Hemingway's principal theme is the American in Europe, it is not his major subject, as it was James'. James found in Europe a richly complex culture and society in which the ironic contrast between American innocence and Old World sophistication could be dramatized on a variety of significant levels. He enjoyed all the benefits of his historical moment, and he took advantage of them with the help of a critical and creative intelligence vastly more complicated than Hemingway's. Hemingway found in Europe not so much a society as a certain set of materials peculiarly suited to his creative personality and peculiarly necessary to the operation of his creative talent. In fact, one finds in his books very little portraiture of Europe itself or of Europeans. Europe appears to serve him almost solely as a psychological background for the dramatic situations of his mostly American characters. And once his American characters are "placed" in Europe, it does not seem to matter very much that they *are* in Europe, for they have little to do with Europe, and Hemingway himself is not really

interested artistically in Europe. His dramatic situations—or let us say his single recurrent dramatic *situation*—appears to be ultimately extra-environmental, to be composed of a certain set mechanism of challenge, response, failure or success. The situation exists, finally, not in Europe or anywhere else but in the world of his art. The European environment is a still-life painting as it pretty much is in *The Sun Also Rises*, particularly in the descriptions of Spanish landscape, or it is a reflector of moods as it is in *A Farewell to Arms*, or it is a carnival setting which contrasts ironically with the main action—as it does in the Pamplona sections of *The Sun Also Rises*.

In much the same way, Hemingway's books are essentially not about people but about their situation, his stock situation, the situation of test in circumstances of crisis—so that they are in a sense parables of human action rather than portraits of human beings. On the basis of this, one might hazard the distinction that James was a real novelist because his situation was centered in his people and their relationships to one another and to the social world, while Hemingway is innately a short-story writer because his concern is with situations (or a single situation) and with the relations of people not to one another but to the abstract forces of destiny or fatality. Hemingway has no society in the Jamesean sense, but he does have a situational world composed of metaphorical constructions of his ideas, and this world is, as I have said, extra-environmental, for it draws not upon the the observable social scene but upon psychically-engendered elements of crisis and response to crisis.

Yet it is obvious that the world of Hemingway's novels depends to a very important secondary degree upon emotional as well as physical circumstances peculiar to Europe. One notices, for example, how very often his ironic effects are achieved through the use of the point-of-view of the American stranger abroad, and how often his ironic and dramatic effects are achieved through the use of Americans seen in terms of the moral or professional code of Europeans such as bullfighters, soldiers, British white-hunters, Italian bartenders and headwaiters. Even more importantly, the condition of foreignness abroad, of Americans seen out of context and without the supports of their native habitat, is

absolutely central to the dramatic situation with which Hemingway appears to be obsessed. And when the condition of foreignness is coupled with the condition of European crisis, whether it is European war, European emotional fatigue, or European ceremonials and sports, we have the Hemingway dramatic situation in its most characteristic form.

The purest examples of this are to be found, in my opinion, in the first two novels—*The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*. The people of *The Sun Also Rises* are perfect embodiments of the worst effects of the condition of foreignness. They are portrayed as being unmoored, disenchanted, isolated from every kind of relationship with social and moral order except that which they create for themselves in the form of an "in-group" etiquette. It is not surprising that this etiquette of theirs is no more than a civilian adaptation of the code of survival of men at war, or that it is an American exile adaptation of the code of European men of sport. It insists upon absolute concentration on process and method—the task immediately at hand, whether it be the task of taking another drink or of simply living one's life—and rigid avoidance of thought and emotion. Robert Cohn of course both thinks and feels, and so constitutes the destructive agent. It is he who breaks the rules, and it is he who at the end is broken by a far stronger set of rules than those he has broken. For the code of the bullfighter Romero is brought up against the code-violator as well as against the American exile code, and it is Romero's code which is finally triumphant, and his values that are shown, like the earth itself, to abide forever. The condition of European crisis is juxtaposed with the condition American foreignness, and the test ends in failure for our side.

In *A Farewell to Arms* the situation is basically the same. Frederic Henry is in fact a man at war, but still a foreigner in Europe, and he lives initially by the code of the fighting man, even though as a foreigner he knows that the war is not his war and that he is not really a fighting man. He is, nonetheless, a great respecter of the rules, and is fully aware of the dangers of emotion and thought. But the condition of crisis puts a severe strain on the rules; it is, in fact, one of the major ironies of the novel that it is the war itself which breaks the rules by wounding Frederic

and violating his neutrality. And when this occurs, he succumbs to emotion in spite of himself, begins genuinely to love Catherine Barkley, and to find in his love for her a substitute for the security which adherence to the rules had formerly given him. But the condition of crisis still obtains, is, in fact, worsened by the love affair which, by being conducted without regard for the taboos against emotion, is open to the destructive force of fatality. This force exacts its punishment through the death of Catherine in childbirth and the resulting isolation of Frederic in the condition of foreignness.

Once again the test ends in failure for our side, and once again for the same reasons. In order to survive the condition of foreignness under the pressure of crisis, a man must suppress his humanity and concentrate wholly on the process of survival. But no man is a machine, just as no man is an island. Sooner or later he must think and feel and by so doing make himself vulnerable and engineer his own destruction. The pattern is actually very Grecian; Aristotle would have entirely approved. So, for that matter, would Joseph Conrad. But in order to create it, in order to find the raw materials for it, Hemingway has had to seek out extreme instances of crisis and dramatize them with certain standardized character types and emotional responses. This is undoubtedly why he has been throughout his career an incorrigible ambulance chaser and courter of violence, and why he has found Europe such a necessary setting for his fiction. In Europe he has been able to observe the condition of foreignness and the condition of crisis in circumstances best suited to the demands of his creative imagination.

But it is evident that this basic situation of Hemingway's is a gravely limited one, and allows scarcely at all for the kind of growth and new exploration which we expect from our greatest artists. It *demands* a certain fixed number and kind of artistic ingredients, and in Hemingway's case, it depends for its success upon being presented through experiences which he has felt deeply and directly. For all his work indicates that Hemingway is really capable as an artist only when he is writing about something he thoroughly knows. His talent for pure or projective invention is very indifferent indeed. It would appear that in his

first two novels he was completely engaged in the experiences he was describing and, therefore, was able to exploit the full force of his basic situation. But his three later novels make it clear that there are at least three areas of interest with which he cannot deal and in respect to which his basic situation is insufficient to carry him through. These are the areas of sociology, politics, and his own personal and superficial feelings of sentimentality and self-pity. It always seems to be the case with Hemingway that he loses his artistic perspective whenever his material is deficient in dramatic tension, his feelings about it are personally rather than creatively oriented, or whenever he attempts to handle it intellectually rather than intuitively. In *To Have and Have Not* the story of Harry Morgan by itself adheres quite closely to the rules of the basic Hemingway situation. It is another account of the strong man going down under the superior force of fatality. But the sections devoted to the corrupt and idle rich, which of course are meant to contrast ironically with Morgan's dilemma, are for the most part deeply ineffectual because imaginatively unengaged and unrealized. The point is that Hemingway had *ideas*, sociological ideas, about these sections, and he is not the kind of writer to be able to handle ideas in fictional form.

One encounters very much the same sort of problem in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Robert Jordan's physical situation is classic Hemingway, and it is well handled and convincing because it exists on the level of action to which Hemingway has always had a sure and dependable response. But the passages devoted to Jordan's political speculations are hopelessly out of key with the action, and represent Hemingway's strenuous effort to find a meaning for Jordan's conduct in an area of value to which he himself can respond only with his head and not at all with his heart. There is, furthermore, the problem that Hemingway has always functioned best from a position of distrust of causes and organized movements. He took this position because he strongly *felt* it after his experiences in the first war. His attempt, therefore, to affirm the importance of the cause and the movement in Robert Jordan's story represents a violation of his true attitudes, and the violation shows not only in the ideas themselves which are presented but in the very language in which they are expressed.

Across the River and Into the Trees seems to me to represent Hemingway at the very pinnacle of his artistic badness. Nothing in it appears to have been precisely conceived; everything in it appears to have been sloppily felt. The book has no restraint, no tone, and no style. It is all a drunken sentimental sob, and it is painful to have to mention it at all.

The Old Man and the Sea appears, particularly in the gruesome light of its predecessor, to represent something of a recovery for Hemingway. At least it represents a return—perhaps a very strategic return—to the sort of situation which he has always been able to handle best, to his basic situation, in fact, which is really the only one he has been able to handle effectively at all. But even though the book has a certain classic purity of line as well as a good deal of sheer narrative power, it seems to me to show signs of some of the emotional muzziness which spoiled the earlier novel. I, at least, have felt on reading it that Hemingway is being very careful, sticking very close to his tried and true effects, being very cautious about his energies, and doing everything he can to turn out a performance that will meet the standard set by his first and best work. In other words, I have the impression that the book was written out of what Hemingway could *remember* of his former style and manner, and that, as a result, the experience it describes is not vividly or freshly imagined, but is an imitation or recollection of the sort of thing that Hemingway was once able to imagine vividly and freshly. I seem to detect about it the odor of the library and the file cabinet, and, above all, of that thick scrapbook of publicity photos and rave book reviews. It is certainly not the absolutely true book which Hemingway has always wanted each of his books to be, but it is a perfectly good counterfeit of a true book, and Hemingway has always had the skill to make his counterfeits seem as though they were almost true.

There is no doubt but that Hemingway, in spite of his frequent failures, is now the most popular of the serious American novelists of this age. But he is also—as is now generally recognized—a curiously limited writer, and it may well be that his limitations account for about as much of his popularity as his strengths do. He is, furthermore, a curiously American writer both in the character of his education in life and literature and in the attitudes

which he has typically taken toward life and literature. Unlike his fellow countryman William Faulkner or his European contemporaries Camus, Moravia, and Silone, he has not given us a major vision of 20th Century emotional, philosophical, or political experience. But he has provided us with one of the most compelling minor visions we have of a central reality of our time, and like his own best heroes, he has been able, above all, to endure with honor as an artist, and nearly always to display immense grace under the pressure of fatality.



Sam Bradley

To Mark an Eagle

Courage faces pinions, lest
a greatness vanish. Will you look in
an eagle's nest?

To band a bird, to swing
on nylon rope above
the nest—this too is love
intrepid to learn of where
and, mission ended, when
this sky-cleaver

migrates (fearing no pyre
of thorn-ultimate fire
nor hot arrows of men).

Look in. And your hazarded hand
that must defend, as well as band,
has only a leather glove.

The mark, the trace of nature, is love.

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Katherine Anne Porter

ON FIRST MEETING T. S. ELIOT

Cousin, if one lives long enough, everything will come, even death, even a promised photograph. I was so long in getting hold of this myself, I almost forgot why I had it at all; then, in moving, papers get packed away and forgotten. Quite often I find mss. of stories half finished that I can hardly believe I ever started.

I saw T. S. Eliot for the first time when he was here last (New York, opening of his play, *The Cocktail Party*), and this is an astonishingly fine likeness of him as of right now, so far as any photography may be trusted at all. He is a charming, sweet-mannered man, with beautiful conversation. I have seen only a very few real geniuses, great persons in their gifts and achievements, and it occurred to me again on meeting this one that those I have seen shared in common the simplicity and dignity of manner that does come with long experience of living, thinking and feeling about art, about human beings, about religion or ideas or emotions as *realities*; *working* as artists, blessed be, they seem naturally to outgrow, to shed, all kinds of fears and the horrid affectations and other nonsense that come of fears. They lose self-importance, and the vanity of impressing their personalities on others; I feel that this poet was never much afflicted with either.

It had been a very long ordeal: I didn't get to the last party until nearly ten in the evening, but he had been honored almost to exhaustion: a huge long luncheon, a crowded cocktail party, a vast dinner, and a roaring late party with all three floors of a good-sized house densely populated by a frenetic glass-in-hand crowd. There were at least a dozen well-known literary drunks, besides non-literary ones, swarming around him at once, whirling and changing places, being elbowed away and striving back, grabbing him, patting him, *owning* him, trying to claw each other away from him.

This was originally included in a letter from Miss PORTER to a distant relative. The letter was accompanied by a photograph of the poet.

He didn't resist, but he didn't give way, either; it was quite something to see and remember in the way of self-possession without self-assertion, gentleness without weakness, a St. John of the Cross sort of thing, and at what a party, too!

I shook hands with him and he smiled and drew me into the ring and asked me to sit by him, and I did; but only for a few seconds and a few words, then I escaped before I should be torn in pieces. Miss Marianne Moore, at a good distance, holding her glass of fruit juice, observed the behavior of a certain gentleman not carrying his liquor too well, and remarked in her beautiful velvet voice, "That man is simply speckled all over like a trout with impropriety . . ." which I must write down for you before it gets away from me. I wandered away from group to group and managed to find somebody to bring me a few drinks, and finally not able to bear the scrimmage, I went home. I looked back for a glimpse of the poet as I went. He was as serene and collected as if he sat easily in the void of the hurricane, where no doubt he *does* sit. One doesn't arrive there without a struggle, and the marks are on him as you see, but they are no disfigurement.

This is never to hint that he was a teakwood Buddha without nerves or a queasy midriff. He drank quite what he wanted and seemed to enjoy it and carried it perfectly, only toward the end of this preposterous day he looked paler and thinner and taller, and there was a light dew on his brow and the back of his neck, and he smiled a little more perseveringly, and was more inclined to confine his remarks to simple assent: "Yes indeed!" or "Quite!" I am happy to have seen him and I was charmed with him.

Michael Millgate

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN TATE

Int.: Henry James said it was a complex fate to be an American. Do you agree?

Tate: No, I don't think so. Archibald MacLeish once wrote a poem beginning "It is a strange thing to be an American." I objected to that a little, because it seems perfectly normal to be American: I can't imagine being anything else. I can't imagine anybody imagining anything else.

Int.: Is it a complex fate to be a Southerner, shall we say?

Tate: I don't know what it is to be a Southerner in the South now, or how the younger generation feel about it. I've lived away from the South too long. But I think it is a little more complex to be a Southerner. We were always excluded from the "benefits" of the Union—we were up to about 1914. We were Uncle Sam's other province.

Int.: Don't you still feel excluded?

Tate: I don't think Southerners feel excluded any more. We were proud to be excluded. Perhaps the South is getting to be like the rest of America. It's getting awfully rich, but part of the old Southern scepticism was the consciousness of superiority in poverty.

Int.: Is it a complex fate to be a writer?

Tate: To be a Southern writer? I suppose it is. I remember years ago a journalist in North Carolina, Jonathan Daniels, said that Southerners had the peculiar misfortune of being exiles even when they were at home. That is, the bottom had dropped out of the South and the old South had disappeared so rapidly that no Southerner knew any longer who he was or where he ought to be.

Int.: Do you think the South did anything towards making you a writer.

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Tate: I'm sure it did. If I'd been a Middle Westerner or New Englander doubtless I would have been something else. But that's a very difficult question to discuss, because obviously the place where one lives makes one what one is and I happen to be a writer; so it would follow that the South made me one.

Int.: Did you always intend to be a writer or did there come a definite moment of choice? Was it something you were always going to be from your very early days?

Tate: I began writing things when I was about fourteen years old as all young people do, many of them without any intention of becoming writers. I remember that I was more or less forced into it by incompetence. I couldn't do anything else.

Int.: And when did you come to realize this?

Tate: When I was about twenty-one, I think.

Int.: And you decided then straight away that you were going to be a poet, in fact.

Tate: I was more concerned about that: I wanted to be a poet. And anything else I've done has been rather incidental, and very much a side issue. Usually to make a living—writing essays, or giving lectures, or reviews, and things like that.

Int.: What about your novel? You've only written one novel—a very fine one, if I may say so.

Tate: I wrote that accidentally because I was going to do a book concerning two different kinds of American families: Pioneer families and Colonial families, coming down about a hundred and fifty years and finally coming together; that is, two strains in my own family. I couldn't write it as history. So I decided to do just one side of the book that I'd originally planned; so that the novel, *The Fathers*, was the result.

Int.: Do you think that either consciously or unconsciously it fulfilled any kind of autobiographical function?

Tate: I think it probably did. The narrator may be a projection of myself. Perhaps the hero, if he can be so described, George Posey, is a rather romantic version of one of my elder brothers.

Int.: Would this have anything to do with the fact that you've never written another novel?

Tate: I think it probably does, because I'm not a novelist. I

don't think novelistically. Again, by definition, a novelist is a person who writes novels. Plural, not one novel.

Int.: You insist on your poetry, primarily?

Tate: Well, I wouldn't insist. But just negatively I would say I'm not a novelist because I've no real impulse to write another novel.

Int.: Could we come back to the poetry? You're generally regarded as a "difficult" poet. Do you feel any need to apologize for this?

Tate: I'm sorry that people find my verse difficult. Of course, I see nothing difficult about it at all. It's all perfectly plain to me, up to a point: that is, in so far as one can understand what one has written. From one point of view a writer is the last person to understand his own writings. But my verse doesn't seem difficult to me, and I don't feel like apologizing for it. If people can't read it and eventually cease to read it at all, that's just the chance that I have to take as a poet.

Int.: Do you have any particular audience in mind when you're writing?

Tate: No, I don't. I usually think of somebody whom I'd like to please, some friend of mine. I used to write to please two people more than any others. John Crowe Ransom, who was my former teacher, and the late John Peale Bishop, who was a very old friend of mine. In the early days I always hoped that Robert Penn Warren would like what I wrote. We all used to exchange our manuscripts a great deal.

Int.: Could you say anything about how you actually write a poem? How does the poem come into being? What do you start with? An idea? An image?

Tate: There are different ways I go about it. Sometimes I get a whole line. I don't quite know where it's going, but if I feel a certain excitement I've got to write another line. Sometimes it's only an image or a phrase. Sometimes it isn't that: it's only a sense of direction; something at which I'd like to arrive at the end of the poem, and I try to devise ways of getting there. Sometimes I write the last stanza or last few lines first. But that isn't a rule by any means. I think that any kind of writing is a little

like wrestling—no holds barred; you are allowed to do anything you can to get started.

Int.: Do you find that one line, say, is “given” and the rest has to be worked for?

Tate: It all has to be worked for, or worked at, or worked with, after you get it. But generally speaking you write an image or line as it comes to you. But I don’t think I work for the rest; it’s simply that one thing follows after another.

Int.: Well, when you revise . . .

Tate: That’s different and it’s the worst part. No poem can or ought to have the same intensity from beginning to end, and after revision you often add a stanza, or certainly a few lines, to round out the composition or to time the poem better.

Int.: These are the directions in which you work?

Tate: Yes; and some years later I’m unable to distinguish those lines which came spontaneously from the ones that I had to set about deliberately writing to fill in. It’s often very difficult to detect the difference.

Int.: Is it possible to say what your aim is in writing verse?

Tate: I have no idea really. Except that I want to write it, and looking back over many years I see certain themes and images that recur. I suppose they are what psychologists would call “compulsive” images or symbols, although I’m not very much aware of the images at a symbolic level, but rather of something I’ve got to discharge and get rid of temporarily, perhaps to arrive at what Kenneth Burke calls the “paper solution” to these problems. This is often about the best solution that one can ever come to; and if the poet has any advantage over the non-poet it is simply that he can get a little temporary relief from his difficulties. But it’s only temporary: it all starts again almost immediately.

Int.: With which of your poems have you been most satisfied?

Tate: I can’t say that I’m satisfied with any, except for a little while after one seems to be finished, because I see certain things that went wrong in it and I want to write something else in an effort not to commit the same blunders.

Int.: Could you say who have been the main influences on you as a poet?

Tate: Influence is a very difficult thing. As we know, the aca-

demic scholars tend to be pretty literal minded about it. They find a line in one's poetry and say this is influenced by somebody else or some particular line in another poet. Or they say that all poets are influenced and therefore if you can find out which poet influenced *this* poet it will help you understand his work better; but it doesn't. I would say that although John Crowe Ransom's poetry had no influence whatever on mine, his influence on me as a young man was greater than any influence I've ever felt from anybody else. It was the influence on the very conception of poetry that I tried to develop later. I suppose T. S. Eliot's poetry influenced me a little when I was around twenty-two or twenty-three. I'm not sure. It's a very intangible thing. Ezra Pound and Yeats, of course, and some of the seventeenth century poets like Marvell, and a little of Donne.

Int.: Classical poets?

Tate: Perhaps. But there's no classical influence in any poem that I've kept, I think, or kept in print, or very little. Maybe *The Mediterranean* has some.

Int.: Would you say your religious beliefs had any great influence on your work?

Tate: I would think so. Those religious beliefs were slowly arrived at, and if it doesn't sound like a frivolous paradox I might even say that my writings have influenced my religious beliefs. That is to say that the whole effort of the literary imagination is toward a kind of incarnation of reality in language. So that every poem that we consider a good poem is a kind of incarnation. An embodiment of something that is very elusive in our consciousness remains specific and definite, in certain places, at certain times, in language. And there's no doubt that the Christian incarnation—the reality of that for us, for all men after the Resurrection, is an incarnation in language, theologically and symbolically, in the Bible. I'm not claiming religious revelation for poetry, mine or anybody else's—far be it from me to claim it for mine—for this is merely analogical thinking. That's the way my mind—the direction it takes, at any rate.

Int.: Do you find any special conditions, then, either mental or spiritual, particularly favorable to writing?

Tate: Yes, but I've occasionally been surprised that I could

write things under unfavorable conditions. The most favorable it seems to me are not necessarily physical conditions, but a kind of boredom. Nothing else must seem very interesting. I like to write looking out of a window at something which is extremely dull—not worth looking at. Chimneys, roofs, and things like that. But if the landscape is exciting I'm very likely not to be able to do any work. I've never been able to work in Italy—there's always too much to look at—too great an excitement of the senses. I should think the English landscape in winter would be ideal. The perpetual mist and fog could be one reason, I suppose, why English literature is probably the greatest in Europe. Such a bad climate.

Int.: What about the monastic life? Would this be favorable?

Tate: It wouldn't be for me. I don't think this has generally been favorable for poets at any time. There are very few monastic poets who have been first-rate.

Int.: I take it that your political and social views are still decidedly conservative?

Tate: Yes, they are.

Int.: Do you still think of yourself as a Southern agrarian?

Tate: Yes, I do. That doesn't mean that I think Southern agrarianism will prevail. That's something quite different. I actually never thought so, even at the time we published our symposium, *I'll Take My Stand*, but I think that the point of view expressed in that symposium and in the essays by my friends, and in some of the essays by myself, represents the permanent values of Western society. It isn't our fault if our fellow-Americans don't want to adopt them. I consider that *they* are the eccentrics, that is, off-center. I remember years ago John Peale Bishop and John Dos Passos and I were talking about the "American dream," and I was a little surprised to see that Mr. Dos Passos took it seriously and John Bishop and I seemed not to. John Bishop said, "You know, the American dream is a nightmare," and that's the way I feel about it.

Int.: You feel the situation's got worse since *I'll Take My Stand*?

Tate: America has become much more prosperous and much richer and more powerful, and I can scarcely say that most of my

compatriots would consider that a worse condition; but in the long run we'll have to decide whether it is for the better or for the worse.

Int.: Do you see *any* improvements in American life, American standards, of any kind?

Tate: In certain ways, yes. I just don't know. No, I don't think so. I don't think there's an improvement at all. I want to be as honest as possible about this. I'm inclined to agree with something Christopher Dawson said about the late Roman Empire: that you could have terrific material progress, and I would say that we have terrific technological progress, with a corresponding moral decay. It's not only true of America, it's true of Europe, it's true of the whole Western world. That's one reason why we're in such trouble.

Int.: Do you think it's likely to be a period productive of literature?

Tate: It can often be. Those moments when decay is setting in usually witness a heightened self-consciousness on the part of the writer or of the artist of any sort; no doubt that happened in the Elizabethan age in England.

Int.: Did it happen in the South?

Tate: It happened in the South at about the time of the first World War, on a much smaller scale. The consciousness that the past was being overwhelmed or had been, and that the South was going to have to take its place in the modern world, had, at least to my mind, a great deal to do with the rise of the Southern writers. William Faulkner's very much concerned with that, whether consciously or not. He came at the exact moment when it was possible to dramatize the change.

Int.: I suppose in the 'twenties this was a general feeling amongst writers? About the decay setting in?

Tate: Well, not so much in the North. There it was a revolt against the doctrine of prosperity and the American standard of living. And they were all against Victorianism. It was a general loosening-up of the old religious and moral taboos centering in the New England Puritan conception of the way of life; but I'm not sure that people were so conscious of decay: they thought of it rather as a liberation.

Int.: Yes, I was thinking more, first of Eliot, and then of that whole group of writers in Paris.

Tate: That branch of modern literature very definitely represents a consciousness of decay, not only in America but in Europe as well. You can easily see why so many Southerners became aware of this state of mind in Europe and were responsive to it, and it is one reason why many of us in the South were more influenced by Europeans than we were by our Northern contemporaries.

Int.: Did you in the 'twenties think of yourself as a member of a "lost generation"? Did you feel particularly lost yourself?

Tate: Not in the sense that Gertrude Stein seemed to mean, if she meant anything. I don't think she meant anything. I think it was just a wisecrack, and Hemingway picked it up and dramatized himself around it. I didn't think of myself as belonging to a lost generation—I felt a little alienated from my background, as I think everybody else did at that time; and our generation was just trying to find itself, and on the whole it was rather successful in that task.

Int.: Do you have any advice to offer young poets of today?

Tate: I don't know about the English, but the young American poets are always seeking too much advice, it seems to me. They are too conscious of their elders and they ought to forget about us. In my middle twenties it never would have occurred to me to send a manuscript to a man at my present age: I'd have been scared to death of him. It's not that way now. So that my advice to young poets is usually to offer them none.

David R. Bunch

IN THE EMPIRE

Oh, we used to have gay times in the empire, the empire of John Bradley (SOME-Deal) Deale, to be exact. There were always the bowling scores to discuss and doughnuts to go and get, and coffee and tea, and the pay day every two weeks, the semi-detached waiting, and sometimes at this mapping and information agency for the government one of us would have a baby. Then it would be passing out of cigars and lighting up all the time, and slapping of backs till lunch break, and yelling and horsing around all afternoon until almost time to secure.—HERE COMES PAPA, whatta man! How's the wife and kid doing? Another girl (boy)—good for you!—And then it would be back again to the semi-detached waiting, the eyes of each searching casually for a weakness in a coworker, some cracking up, some inability to wait it out with dignity and always seem in place at this mapping and information agency for the government. And sometimes we had an assignment at this government installation, I won't say we didn't.

And one time we had this project. They walled off an area, isolated it with black curtains, brought some men up from another floor—compilers, they called them! put up a big sign that said **AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, TOP SECRET PROJECT**, and were in business. Then it was just John Bradley (SOME-Deal) lounging back in his little corner office at his desk in the corner of a corner of his empire, right where I could see him and he could see me when I happened to look up from my semi-detachment of doing nothing, or my full detachment of reviewing an old training-phase compilation. Sometimes I would glance into the hollow blue of his almost wholly faked gaze of discernment, and I would shudder. Because I would know he was trying to consider me in his main and eternal pastime of personnel assessment and character evaluation.

Stories by DAVID R. BUNCH have appeared in such publications as *San Francisco Review*, *Southwest Review*, and *New Mexico Quarterly*.

Well, John B. (SOME-Deal) Deale was coordinator of this big TOP SECRET thing, and he was the only one from our floor who could go behind the black curtains for a peek at our TOP SECRET compilation. It was a show to watch him walk, wading through the flaps of the opening—very detached stride, casual hands in casual lead-blue suit pockets, elbows crooked just so, shoulders up like tired eagles lighting—and after about fifteen minutes watch him come wading back through the flaps, a kind of hollow-nothing gaze on his face now, as if he had just seen the awesome and had withstood it. I sitting pretending beside an old training-phase compilation would gather—what else could I think?—that GS-12 John Bradley (SOME-Deal) Deale had just gazed upon things almost too secret for God himself to know.

So we went on waiting while this big TOP SECRET thing shaped up behind the black curtains, and again there were only the bowling scores to discuss, and the doughnuts to go and get, and the coffee or the tea, and the waiting the two weeks out until the minor excitement of pay day. With a difference now. Out from the black-curtain area those compilers from another unit would swagger and stand looking at us like we were cold spit on the floor, and then they would gaze all around our area as if seeing everything clearly in a kind of blanket stare and evaluating everything correctly in a kind of God's judgment just before ambling on up to get their doughnuts, and their coffee or tea, with the sure walk of Captains to the snack bar.

But it was SOME-Deal himself stopping by my work table in his lead-blue suit of very detached and casual cut who broke the monotony one day, just cracked it wide with a startling statement, quiet and level out of his gray mouth, and the cold-water wavering of his blue eyes past me in no real look. "Our project is on the point of being completed. Tomorrow. On time!" He waved a little half-hitch gesture of blue-lead shoulder—casual hands in casual pockets, thumbs outside—relaxed—at the black-curtain place and waited. Not knowing what else to do, and dedicated to the principle, when truly in doubt do something, I suddenly exploded, "That's fine! Congratulations! Great day! We made it! I knew we could!" Then I went back to dormant, as befits my status there, and stolidly and industriously I pretended to be interested in

nothing but the review of an old training-phase compilation.

Came the morrow they carried the project out past the black curtains, just whisked it by us with no ceremony at all, two little folders and something that might have been a small map board done up in a canvas rag. The compilers were gone from our floor now, the black curtains came down, the signs that said **AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, TOP SECRET PROJECT** were removed and the secured place was no more. Some of us got up from our doughnuts and coffee or tea and strolled back there very casually, not seeming to care at all whether we went or not, to have a look at what had been the walled-off security place and the big **TOP SECRET** project. The area was completely empty now except for a table and four chairs, and in the middle of a place where the floor looked swept there sat a lumpy brown paper sack with the words **CLASSIFIED WASTE** scrawled on it in orange-red letters.

Seeing, or rather, feeling a shadow at my left elbow, I turned slowly and looked full into the cold-water eyes of GS-12 John Bradley (SOME-Deal) Deale. His blue-lead suit looked pressed that day; his tie was an orange sound. "Yes, we finished up on time," he said, walking the words level and straight out of his grey mouth, "made our due-date for Production Control." Then, as if making some final supreme effort at friendliness, he did his false-face grin, just pursed the lips up some until the teeth showed, and he did the very minimum things with the face muscles, all of which was his patented, very individual, controlled way of not smiling. He said, "I'll go in for my 13 now, I should imagine. Completed this **TOP SECRET** thing on time as well as kept our own work humming in the unit." Slowly, as if deeply thinking and burdened, he turned and walked straight and machine-like away, hands a little too stiff at the elbows, I thought, in casual pockets, back to his corner office to his desk in a corner of the corner, and, poised, he sat looking out at his empire, his suit pads up like dull blue shoulders of eagles, his cold-water eyes not saying yes or no that I could be really sure of while we had our fifth morning coffee-break over again in a kind of tribute to the excitement.

But I was shaken, after I bothered to think about it. Yes, I

was. Near the middle of the afternoon, after mulling it over through several doughnut sessions interspersed with generous intervals of trying to look like a real employed civil service worker, I got up and shot straight and true to the desk in the corner of a corner of the empire. I put my balled fists hard on the desk of John Bradley, and though I was shaking some and truly aware of the unorthodox show I was making, I resumed our conversation. "What happens to the compilers, now that they've wrapped our TOP SECRET project up on time and gone home to their units?"

He came up from something he was doing with a paper clip in what must have been a far corner of his desk drawer, and I saw his eyes had a strange smooth frost in them that I had not before known of. "They will be taken care of by their unit supervisor," he said, jumping the words at me like warnings. "Their unit supervisor will prepare some adequate comment of commendation and cause that to be placed on a card in each man's permanent folder. That unit supervisor will probably get a grade-raise also for being able to carry on in his unit with key personnel absent on Special Projects." He looked at me with a kind of dare in his eyes, or maybe a dogged defense for the rightness of all things promotion-wise in a really well-built civil service empire, and then he said quite coldly, "It will go on your record and be placed on a card in your permanent folder if you do not return to your work area immediately and resume your cartographic duties at once."

Resume my cartographic duties at once? What cartographic duties? I came back to my work area, looked at the bare drafting table for awhile, and finally I suggested to a coworker, cleaning and clipping his nails for about the fifth time that day, that we go for doughnuts and coffee. He thought it a fair suggestion, so we ambled toward the snack bar, rediscussing the league bowling scores and when would we get a grade raise, if ever. "SOME's getting another one," I said, and the coworker said, "He is?"

"Yes, because he finished that project up on time. You know, the one behind the TOP SECRET curtains. As well as kept the work humming in the unit."

"Made his due-date, huh," the coworker said, not even thinking, I could tell, "as well as kept the work hum—?" And then he

stopped dead in his tracks, jerked and looked alive for a moment as something cold and thought-like must have hit him in the head. And I reckoned maybe there was still hope, though God knew where, or for whom.



Albert Howard Carter

In Bed, Waiting

The wallpaper roses and
the insubstantial birds
recede

The curtains bloat
like a toad in danger
then rush to press
the stolid window screen

How far it is to the nearest corner
of this in healthy times
too small room

The patient playing patience
too soon before pill time
to sleep

too late to face a day's remnant
of unresolved minor matters
of comfort

The cold hand on the fevered forehead
is friendly, compassionate
and yet it tells
how far it is from sick to well.

ALBERT HOWARD CARTER, Dean of Humanities at Florida Presbyterian College, has been published previously in *Shenandoah*, as well as in numerous other magazines.

Leonard E. Nathan

Three Fog Poems from Sea Level

I

Fog Horns

When the Bay is a long loaf of swelling fog,
The horn sounds. It sounds again, again
To all the unseen vulnerable drifters at sea,
On land, a blind warning from a dark bulk
Throbbing at its own invisible center; this sound—
Or hand lifted to guard, or haranguing spirit
Mourning its isolation, or hysteria
Calling in circles to itself—speaks now
To my vulnerable bed drifting at sleep,
My own invisible center toward its dream
Where the horn dissolves into the voices there.

II

Liquid Amber in Fog

In morning's milk light and gray acres
Of doubt, the Liquid Amber, like unseen spirit,
Upstairs, diminished by a million lives
Of leaves and birds; out there the once great-headed,
Gold, and autumn bell I heard tolling
Stands dumb, if different or less than what
My faith calls for, still poorly stands for me,
A stunned groping upward of the root.

LEONARD NATHAN'S poetry has appeared in many periodicals, including *Poetry and Commentary*. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Leonard E. Nathan

III

Down Here

There is some light down here, but no sun.
This is for shallow breathing, humid air
Resting on low roofs, one whole sky,
Or gray suspense, for inconspicuous doom;
But when she cries, "It's snowing at Pinecrest," news
Of that high truth catches the breath with light
And out of the icy clutch of pines last year,
The deer's child runs again to its own pleasure.



John Tagliabue

Not Shipwrecked but Noah's Barc
(Rejoice, Joyce)

O
this weather cry of man
whether he knows it or not, It,
Sea Bound, Clouds and All, Poor Mankind
King with a Fish in his Cap, Cupboard of Dreams
and Histories, Rivers under his bed, his Creation
like barks of trees, like hunters, Searching, Well
come, but, this fine foul high storm pitched welkin
weather of a sprouter and spouter Occurred, Shouted It,
once More,
Moons tossed, And holding it Creation close to his
Breast Bone
he marvelled at the rise of sunrise.
Calmly in his boat he continued
... and you, Reader? ...

JOHN TAGLIABUE's *Poems* (a first collection) appeared in 1959. He is with the Department of English at Bates College.

John Tagliabue

The old carrying their legs went up to Heaven
knocked at the Door and said God give me Supper;
He dusted off the table and done give them Supper;
then they went for a Boat Ride and the old grandma
with a red rag around her head
and her old gold teeth shining
and the old man loose cock or pirate dangling
snored and raged and smiled, smiled, and smiled
for miles I guess for millions of miles,
they peered like children over that heavenly boat
sometimes they wept for the children
in the cotton fields below sometimes they saw
an aunt or an uncle lift a leg to get into a coffin,
sometimes they saw girls at First Communion,
sometimes they told God about history,
sometimes they asked God to bless the children
working and working far below.
The Sun took his arms and danced with him.
The Moon remembered her children that she loved
so much far below.

Richard Eberhart

Divorce

The rock that withstands man's arrogance
Is nature's own rock high above the land;
Lofty in the fogs; pure height on walking days,
Something to look at with an aspiring eye.
Yet never its greatness and true strength
Appear until new divorce breaks old forms.
We do not possess it any more,
Not at all, the forms are ruined by arrogance,
Parents and children are sundered by separation.
Life sprawls in unkempt acres.
It is then the rock stands triumphant, beyond man's
Pride that kept him from a noble union.
But divorce separates us also from the rock.

RICHARD EBERHART, whose *Collected Poems, 1930-1960* appeared last year, has until recently been Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress.

BOOK REVIEWS

Mémoires Intérieurs. By FRANÇOIS MAURIAC. Translated by Gerard Hopkins. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, New York, 1960.

As a reminiscence, *Mémoires Intérieurs* is quite different from what an Anglo-Saxon reader might expect, for it is by no means the record of persons or events that have directly touched upon Mauriac's life. It is rather the history of his reading. That Mauriac could pen such a book, that it could be anticipated and seriously received in France, attests to the great difference between American and Gallic values. As a typical French man of letters, Mauriac tacitly assumes what few American or British writers would dare voice: Literature is in itself a real aspect of life, not a pallid reflection. Hence what is natural for the French reader—the abiding importance of letters—seems forced when transposed into the Anglo-Saxon context. The American cannot conceive of a man's autobiography being in large part the diary of his reading.

Such a book, then, is refreshing. It reviews great literature with a high but always natural seriousness. While Mauriac's comments are not always profound or original, they are invariably striking. They command attention. Though in his declining years Mauriac admits that he has lost much of his youthful interest in reading, he remains an acute observer. He relives his reading in recollection and brings to it the insights of age and experience.

Mauriac has a grave limitation, however, as a reader. He is ultra-orthodox. Though urbane enough to appreciate *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*, Mauriac is not sufficiently flexible to appreciate much literature after Proust. He dismisses Romain Gary, without naming him, as a curious story-teller interested in, of all things, elephants. He condescendingly refers to Kafka and Joyce as his juniors, and he rhetorically wonders what their future might be. Mauriac, clearly, lives in the past. But he can appreciate the Western literary legacy in new ways. His pages on Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and on Defoe's *Moll Flanders* are astute assessments. His comments on Gerard Manley Hopkins are pungent, fresh, vital. He can even perceive new nuances in Racine. But his perspicacity ends with the Great War and with the development

of contemporary techniques. Mauriac flounders amidst new ideas of style and form; he, at length, simply does not understand. And he attributes this communication failure not to his lack of sympathy but rather to the new writer's artistic failure.

Mauriac also has an ax to grind. His extreme Catholicism gives him an affinity for writers like Pascal, an antipathy against men like Gide. Emily Brontë, Dostoevsky, Balzac are subjects of predilection, for their worldview fits his own: a God of Western Christendom watches supreme over society, no matter how chaotic, how neurotic, it may become. He writes appreciatively of such writers. But he is repelled by the non-Christian world of the realists. Hence he can dismiss Flaubert and the entire naturalist school with petulant remarks:

I cannot help feeling surprised that the Goncourts' record of their second-rate orgies was so exactly like the pictures conjured up by Emma Bovary and Homais the chemist... It comes to this, that 'reality' in 1851 was precisely like what those fools imagined it to be, and as stupid as they were. Certain utterances of Flaubert, in that year, taken very seriously at the time, might well figure in a 'Dictionary of Commonplaces' for use by artists of his general type. To me they seem no less nonsensical than the statements he put into Homais' mouth.

Such an orthodox Christian has no sympathy for Renan, Giraudoux, Jules Romains. He even dismisses André Gide, the prototype of the modern skeptic, as "a satanic figure." His diatribes border upon the obscene, and his pages burn with hatred. While he is forced against his will to admit that Gide might be a brilliant stylist, he rebels against his subject content. For him Gide is evil and his influence malevolent. The moral judgment, in itself, suffices to dismiss him as a man of letters.

Mauriac's limitations are more obvious than his virtues, I am afraid, to the modern reader. Mauriac wishes to remain static in a kinetic world. He refuses to admit discussion over matters of faith or cataclysmic changes in style and form. Yet, of course, literature will pursue its own course and the world change despite his partisan criticism. Perhaps his greatest value is that he is so frankly what he is: a classicist, a devout Catholic, provincial,

affirmative, and rather obtuse upon occasion. One of his last comments deserves attention: "A work of fiction cannot grow, cannot burgeon except in a generation for which it is fitted." Then he adds that he feels he will write no more. His confession is a tacit admission that he is indeed out of joint with his time. Mauriac is already considered as history, not as a part of the living, ever-thrusting present.

GEORGE ROSS RIDGE

Resistance, Rebellion, and Death. ALBERT CAMUS. Translated by Justin O'Brien. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1961.

Albert Camus once made the observation that he had the habit of letting each single idea which took hold upon his mind develop and ripen by gradual increment over a space of many years. At such a pace one is not apt to attain to the facile, many-faceted wit of a Wilde or a Shaw, nor does the observation suggest a mind gifted with lyric deftness to snare in metaphor its occasional flashes of insight into truth. Indeed if, as was the case with Camus, one's bent is rather more philosophical and moralistic than artistically creative, he would do well through such a process to evolve, in the normal span of an intellectual lifetime, a viable and cohesive "philosophy." Camus achieved none of these things. But through persistent, painstaking, and unerringly lucid fidelity to certain basic ideas he nonetheless raised for himself, in the scant quarter-century of his literary career, a monument more than adequate to stand as the *opera omnia* with which, as his translator Justin O'Brien puts it, he now must face posterity.

The twenty-three essays which make up this first major work of Camus to appear posthumously in English translation were, according to Professor O'Brien's helpful introduction, selected by Camus himself during the last year of his life as those he deemed most worthy to be preserved in English. Ranging in length from the brief but powerful editorials he wrote anonymously

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for the proscribed Resistance journal *Combat* during the German occupation of France to the 60-page *Reflections on the Guillotine* (his portion of the symposium on capital punishment done jointly with Arthur Koestler), the pieces represent selections from occasional writings which Camus himself termed *Actuelles*, and which in France appeared in three volumes between 1950 and 1958.

In spite of the sometimes disconcerting jumps from one topic and tone to radically different ones (attributable, in part at least, to a somewhat capricious topical arrangement which only partially manages to modify the generally unrelenting chronological sequence of the essays), the volume achieves a total effect of wholeness and consistency which can only stem from the inherence of those qualities in the man himself. There are regrettable lacunae, at least for the reader who would seek in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* a balanced and comprehensive delineation of the whole man through a representative account of his progressing thought and experience. For example, none of the early, lyrically sensuous paeans to his Algerian youth, so much a background for the later fictional evocations of his homeland, have been included, though these—at least in part—have appeared elsewhere in translation.

These considerations notwithstanding, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* presents, as no other single volume of his work published in this country has done, the scant handful of core ideas and passions which shaped and governed Camus's life, pointing them up against a kaleidoscope of backdrops, times, and circumstances, revealing in sometimes violently disparate contexts (now in the back of a German truck with captured Resistance fighters being driven to their execution; now before a group of Dominicans telling them what the unbeliever expects of Christians) a mind which has had its beliefs annealed in the thick of battle. Here, as nowhere in previous American editions of his writings, there emerges a Camus whose convictions and stands on problems which for the past quarter-century have vexed and beset the free world are defined with scrupulous and exacting clarity, a Camus disarmingly free of the ambiguity of intent so frequently ascribed to his fiction.

Abundantly evident throughout the selections in this volume

is Camus's most ardent cause: the constant burning passion for human freedom, whether political, artistic, or spiritual. His conception of freedom ("... a perpetual risk, an exhausting adventure [which] people avoid today, as they avoid liberty with its exacting demands, in order to accept any kind of bondage and achieve at least comfort of soul") is in the main that shared by contemporary existentialist theologians. Both are closely within the traditions of Kierkegaard and—most particularly in Camus's case—of that sublime statement of the significance of freedom in Dostoyevski's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. In Camus, as with the others, there prevails the eminently logical (but too often overlooked) proposition that anything short of *absolute* freedom (e.g., "freedom" from security or guarantee, from orthodoxies as well as from panaceas) is a contradiction in terms.

Traced through his enduring, near-obsessive concern with the three recent European abrogations of this most inviolable of mortal birthrights—the Spanish Civil War and the resultant collusion of State and Church in the oppression of liberty in Spain, Hitler's Reich, and the Kremlin's bloodbath retaliation to Hungary's gallant, heartbreaking bid for a return to human dignity ("We can be generous only with our own blood")—to the very heart of his credo as man and artist ("Tyrants know there is in the work of art an emancipatory force which is mysterious only to those who do not revere it"), Camus's abiding concern for ultimate and unqualified freedom in every sphere of human experience might well stand alone as a cherished and sorely-needed redefining for our times. His concomitant reverence for the sanctity of human life would do credit to many a practicing Christian. The spare lucidity of his language and his thought, the frequent brilliance of his aphorisms—both unmistakable marks of distinction in themselves—must nonetheless be considered only secondarily in rendering an appraisal of Camus. One fact—and one to which the present collection bears further, and ample, testimony—stands out before all others: Whatever may be his artistic limitations, Albert Camus, in a span of years which barely saw him reach the fullness of his powers, achieved the distinction, reserved for few men, of having restated in new, vigorous, and incontrovertible terms a portion of those concepts upon whose continuing vitality

the whole, still-unbroken legacy of Western civilization is predicated. That he should have accomplished this mitigates in some measure the tragedy of his loss.

CHARLES B. BROCKMANN

The Evolution of Walt Whitman. By ROGER ASSELINEAU. Translated by the author and Richard P. Adams. Belknap Press, Cambridge, 1960.

The day after Walt Whitman died the attending doctors performed an autopsy on the singer of healthy bodies and loving souls. They found tuberculosis of the lungs, intestines and liver, tubercular abscesses under the sternum and a rib and in the left foot, symptoms of arteriosclerosis in his partly atrophied brain, and a cyst in one of his suprarenal glands. Since then many men have attempted to plumb the poet's life and work in order to recreate for us what was there on the surface, and beneath. Most have tried to penetrate the strange, dim areas of the poet's psyche to explain the in many ways puzzling and contradictory life and poetry of possibly the greatest American poet. Of Whitman's several dozen biographers, Roger Asselineau must rank high among those who scrutinize their subject with precision and with interest for the reader. He achieves this in *The Evolution of Walt Whitman*, now available in a translation by the author and Richard P. Adams of Tulane University.

The Whitman biographer has two prime difficulties which furnish "the fascination of what's difficult" for those who would meaningfully reconstruct the man and poet Whitman was. First hulked an almost insurmountable mountain of material to cover, and to redact in some understandable order. Much of this information was supplied by Whitman and his contemporary *aficionados* who were keenly aware of the legend Whitman wanted to become, both in his poems and in his life, and who supplied many interesting and informative facts about that legend—but not necessarily about the real Walt Whitman. Secondly appear crucial

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spots where the Whitman biography breaks down, gaps in the knowledge of his days and mind, where the biographer must search intelligently, imaginatively, and hopefully, but perhaps never conclusively. And here the biographer must grapple with two highly debatable problems in Whitman's life. He must account for the appearance at all of *Leaves of Grass*, whose author had previously seemed to be only a competent journalist, and he must discuss the role of sex in Whitman's life, a discussion which might, of course, vitally affect the appearance of *Leaves of Grass*.

Asselineau organizes the main known facts of Whitman's life clearly and accurately. He writes briefly of the early years, for since he is concerned with the evolution of Whitman the poet he finds little in those years worth deep investigation. "Nothing in the [early] life justifies any prediction of the sudden blossoming of such a strange masterpiece," he concludes, though naturally he mentions Whitman's heritage, the dour father, the worshipped mother, the Quaker strains, the siblings so oddly like Emerson's in their tendency to physical and mental illness. Because the biography is selective, possibly a clearer presentation of the known events in Whitman's life emerges than from Gay Wilson Allen's *The Solitary Singer*. Allen's excellent book is probably for our time definitive, but for the uninitiated reader especially, the cascade of sheer fact tends to blur the outline of Whitman as an actual, recognizable person. And since Asselineau discusses only what is observably germane during Whitman's early years, the "sponge and dreamer" Whitman so frequently "fermenting yeastily" and vaguely in Canby's biography is absent.

Following the necessary facts of Whitman's early years, Asselineau rigorously and clearly pursues what is known of Whitman that relates to the author of *Leaves of Grass*. He clusters his facts and investigations around the various editions of that tree-like growth, and notes the interplay of external and internal conflict that produces each separate edition. He also examines the separate editions and as far as possible differentiates them especially in light of biographical data. His purpose, he says, is to bring out

the meaning of *Leaves of Grass* by continually confronting it with its own successive aspects and with Whitman's other works, as well as what we know of the author and his time . . .

Whitman's book is therefore the fruit of a long life and the mirror of a crucial period of American history.

Asselineau finds that "each new edition marked a victory and was the resolution of a spiritual crisis," and that each successive victory projects a definite tone to the volume that follows. From the first edition, characterized by "its lack of finish...[having] the appearance of a flow of lava...formless...amorphous," to the last ones, when "in spite of failures, difficulties, and disappointments, his faith in himself...won through," Asselineau finds Whitman's life inextricably intertwined with the *Leaves of Grass*. The various crises, sexual, political, those brought about by illness and premature old age, are chronicled, and then related to Whitman's major work, so that as far as possible the reader knows what Whitman was doing at any one time of his life, what he was thinking, and how all this is reflected in his poetry.

In his reconstruction, Asselineau is always sensible, and always seems to focus directly on his subject, not on some preconceived image of the man. He does not hesitate to correct the misinterpretations of others, nor to admit when he does not have a final answer. For example, he indisputably corrects Malcolm Cowley's view of the superiority of the first edition to the second, finding in the 1856 *Leaves* a "definite enrichment of material... a more profound treatment of themes" than the first edition offers. He finds, contrary to some scholars, no parasitism in Whitman's living with his family in 1856, states that the first edition of *Leaves* was not a financial flop, and dispels the fallacy that Whitman's poems were generally and viciously attacked by most critics. That they were attacked is undeniable, but many were equally willing to defend his poems, or to find considerable good in them, and not only members of the Whitman "cult."

Occasionally Asselineau slips; this is not a perfect book, nor is any on Whitman likely to be. For example, it is doubtful that Whitman owed his "mystic idealism" to his "English ancestors." Whitman himself, commenting on his ancestry, remarked that "the Dutch... are terribly transcendental and cloudy too," but obviously neither the English nor the Dutch hold exclusive rights to mystical and transcendental genes. But generally, the book is impeccably correct in the handling of factual detail.

Asselineau thoroughly searches for one of the great unknowns in Whitman's life, the catalytic agent that crystallized out of his vaguely poetic tendencies *Leaves of Grass*. He discusses various theories and concludes probably correctly:

all the hypotheses suggested for the origin of *Leaves of Grass* prove equally unsatisfactory. . . . Each of these theories is too partial and accounts for only one aspect of the question. . . . there is really a cluster of causes.

This may seem a long way around to nowhere, but the way is informative, and the conclusion actually quite sound. Asselineau does evaluate the validity of most of the theories, putting the hypotheses into proper perspective. He rejects the chimerical, thwarted love affair that looms repeatedly throughout Whitman criticism, and similarly discounts Bucke's mystical "cosmic consciousness" as leading to *Leaves of Grass*. He feels that phrenology corroborated certain ideas of Whitman's, and therefore gave him a pseudo-scientific basis for his poetry. Readings in Carlyle and George Sand probably contributed a few poses and attitudes, and most important, Asselineau decides, was the influence of Emerson, an influence significant, but not crucial.

The second dark area in Whitman biography—dark in several ways—is his sex life. Here is the legendary Colchis that has lured so many Jasons seeking the golden fleece of Whitman interpretation. The question attracted a few of Whitman's contemporaries. J. A. Symonds, for instance, wondered if perhaps Whitman were not suffering the same homosexual pangs as he. Whitman wrote to Symonds' guarded query that nothing of the sort was so. To the contrary Whitman said, he had half a dozen illegitimate children.

So it was then, and so it is now certainly, in this age where to have loved one's mother is a crime publishable by Freudian biography.

Edward Carpenter, an English biographer, found in Whitman a lack of desire for feminine companionship, and said that "young men" probably "supplied the deficiency." H. B. Binns simply transposed Whitman's "lady of the South" into a "Southern lady" and the imaginative Leon Bazalgette produced from the time when Whitman lived in sultry New Orleans a high-born French woman.

Emory Holloway, whom it would be simply gratuitous to call an esteemed Whitman scholar, once proposed a Creole octoroon, and later located an illegitimate child for Whitman.

We have had Jean Catel call Whitman auto-erotic, we have had Whitman the bisexual, and we have had Whitman the outright homosexual. Things got so bad for a while that Henry Seidel Canby counterattacked in *Walt Whitman, An American*, with one of the most amazing sections in American literary criticism, proving, he stated, that beyond any doubt Walt Whitman was *not* a virgin.

Asselineau finds that Whitman

experienced in 1858-59 a great passion for a man about whom nothing is known, not even his name. . . . But this great love was probably not returned, and soon Whitman found himself alone, abandoned by his loved one and broken hearted.

Asselineau later says this love shows the "singularity of his inversion," and calls it frankly a "brief homosexual affair" and a "homosexual liaison." Asselineau finds no heterosexual inclinations in Whitman.

Some of Asselineau's evidence is valid, some seems not. By now it should be apparent that anything one desires can be proved by referring to *Leaves of Grass*. However, it is clear that Whitman did suffer some emotional crisis in 1859-60. It is known that during and immediately after this crisis he wrote many of the "Calamus" poems. There is probably a connection, though of course he wrote other kinds of poems too during the period. It is also clear that Whitman suffered from male-centered "perturbations" throughout his life. Where a Whitman notebook for 1870 says, for example, "Remember were [*sic*] I am most weak and most lacking . . . pursue her no more," Asselineau (and Emory Holloway after him) finds "all the masculine pronouns of the text have been erased and replaced by their feminine counterparts."

But possibly Asselineau has posited too definite a case on too slight evidence. The emotional climax of 1859-60 is still rather vague after all. That another man was involved here is an intelligent guess, an informed guess, but still a guess. Moreover, the exact nature of the alleged relationship might well not have involved a "great love," and when later Asselineau refers to the "love" as a "homosexual liaison," a "homosexual affair," we must recognize that he has constructed an imposing superstructure

founded upon good guessing and inference, but not necessarily on fact.

Possibly it is misleading to state so definite a case where the facts do not warrant it. Surely the basic evidence strongly indicates that Whitman had no romantic involvements with any woman. He may have had, but clearly such an involvement seems dubious. It is almost positive that he had no "Southern lady," no "Creole octoroon" as his beloved in New Orleans or anywhere else. The only Creole woman he saw frequently in New Orleans served him his morning coffee, and it appears she weighed about 240 pounds. While this does not obviate a love affair, it makes one somehow less attractive.

It is equally certain that Whitman was strangely drawn to mostly young men of the lower social and intellectual class, and that these attractions bothered him deeply. The exact nature of the difficulty, however, and exactly how much it affected his actions, as opposed to his thoughts, we do not know. The word homosexual is emotionally loaded and is a vague term, in that all men, the psychologists tell us, have traces of homosexuality, and usually at some period of adolescence have a basically homosexual stage. Obviously any term that includes the moon-struck worship of the latest star center-fielder, and the tragic complications of a, say, Oscar Wilde, is not a very useful critical term. When we read a passage such as the following excerpt from one of Whitman's letters, concerning a wounded soldier he was visiting on his regular rounds of the Washington hospitals—

Lew is so good, so affectionate—when I came away he reached up his face [and] I put my arm around him and we gave each other a long kiss half a minute long

we must recognize something strange—and something touching too that we cannot at this distance fully understand, as Whitman at the time possibly did not understand. Perhaps it would be better to say that Whitman was male-centered in his love, or call him a male-lover, a term no less vague than homosexual, but with fewer unwanted overtones.

But even if, concerning Whitman's sexual difficulties, Asse-lineau is not completely valid, his ultimate handling of the problem seems sound when he says that Whitman

generalized his emotions and at the same time purified and transcended them. It was not a matter now of the great passion that had torn him, but a very pure and noble transport which brought men together.

What then is the value of Roger Asselineau's *Whitman*? First, it is a clearly written, well organized book that discusses most of the major events and influences in Whitman's life. He presents the known facts accurately, soberly, and interestingly. He interprets the more shadowy regions cleverly and perceptively. He investigates the specific events and reactions leading to *Leaves of Grass*, and distinguishes the poem's various editions by relating them to those events and reactions.

The life-size portrait of Whitman that evolves is a real if not completely understandable individual. He is not a bloated, boorish Emerson, nor a culture hero to be worshipped; not Walt Whitman, American, big, bragging, wearing the yankee-doodle clothes of one of the roughs. He is a young man, battling—losing and winning too—against strange sexual perturbations he did not fully comprehend, and which we can only grope for. Too soon he is a tired middle-aged man seeing dunces elected by the great American people he wrote for in his poems. And he is a very old man, far older than his years, slowly rotting inside, but clinging vigorously to a mythic vision that transcended—and transcended because it encompassed—all the rottenness he had seen all his life.

For what is my life or any man's life but a conflict with foes, the old, incessant war?

This is what Roger Asselineau has shown.

JACK B. MOORE

Ezra Pound. By CHARLES NORMAN. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1960.

Mr. Norman, who has been making the rounds of the poets these days with books on Christopher Marlowe and E. E. Cum-

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mings, has now written a study of Ezra Pound, the principal value of which will be to serve shakily until someone else prepares a critical biography. Since there is no other strictly biographical work about Pound, Mr. Norman has the distinction of being the first in the field and thereby cannot be compared with anyone else. His emphasis is upon the personality rather than the poetry—an ambitious and praiseworthy objective—but his treatment is so uneven (Pound is born on page 237), so unbalanced (peripheral Pound anecdotes virtually by the pound), and so unfocused that it is difficult to say whether the book is designed for the general or the special reader. I suspect that it was written for the former but will prove useful to neither.

The biographical technique of Mr. Norman is nineteenth-centuryish. That is, the narrative is overburdened with massive documents and at other times “padded” with irrelevant material. Moreover, it is provoking to hear that Pound’s *Cantos* are a “vast storehouse” and to find that Mr. Norman does not intend to take an inventory of them to reveal their wares. Even Pound the man eludes his biographer. And on the rare occasions when Mr. Norman succeeds in cornering his quarry (as in the scenes treating the poet’s incarceration at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital), he is apparently sheepish and uncomfortable around him.

Yet the reader of Mr. Norman’s book will take away a series of impressions, some of them sharply memorable. Pound is the poet who traveled through Italy using Dante as his Baedeker. He is the man who would, and did, write anything, anywhere, anytime, including a poeticized “history of the world,” and a poem celebrating the 250th anniversary of Newark, New Jersey (for which, incidentally, he won tenth prize). He is the irrepressible teacher and savant who if never the Samuel Johnson was at least the Ben Jonson of his age. He is the editor who discovered T. S. Eliot, who saved James Joyce for literature by arranging for grants, who acted as the catalyst for Yeats’ most productive period, and who saw genius in the unknown Paris newsman named Ernest Hemingway.

A book could be written about Pound which would deal only with those conflicting impressions that enemies and friends had of him. For Gertrude Stein, the didactic and dogmatic Pound was

"the village explainer." Mary Colum pointed out that in spite of his ducal beard he was a "slightly eccentric Middle-Western professor." While Eliot remarked on his insatiable "passion to teach," another friend thought that he "brought from America the faults of the Americans and none of the virtues." No one—neither the bevy of governmental psychiatrists who examined him after his return from Italy nor his most intimate friends—has ever determined whether he was a traitor, madman, or a fool.

By far the most interesting and valuable portions of this biography are the last five chapters, carrying his career from 1939 to the present. It is a pathetic history of a poet whose wings drag in the dust, a poet placed in an iron cage at Pisa and treated like an animal rather than a man. Yet caged, Pound sang, and his *Pisan Cantos* show something of the poet's triumph over time and circumstances. Whatever may be said of his views upon politics and sociology, Pound was not a poet in a gray flannel suit whose peace of mind was more important than personal conviction, however impractical and extreme. It is to Mr. Norman's credit that, despite his avoidance of significant critical issues, he does capture something of Pound's personalism and defiance.

CECIL D. EBY, JR.

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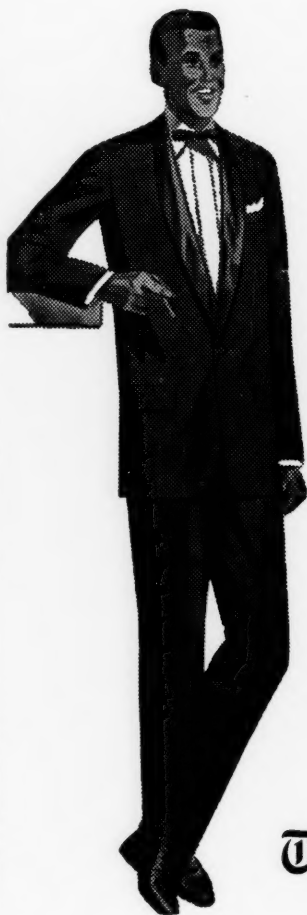
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